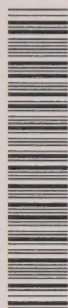


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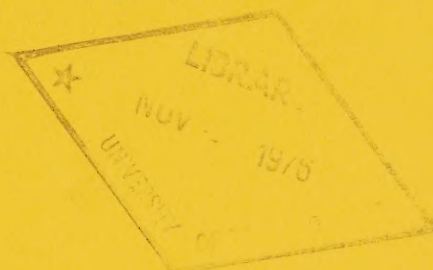
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# Papers on the Greek Community



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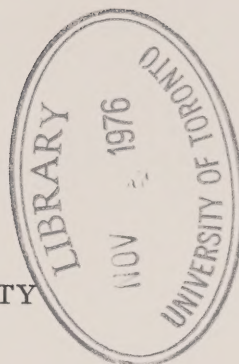
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Robert D. Johnston  
Deputy Minister



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PAPERS ON THE GREEK COMMUNITY

Page

Report on the  
Greek Intercultural  
Seminar

1

Greek Family Life  
by C. Antoniou at the  
Greek Intercultural Seminar


13

Cultural Background and Social Adjustment  
of the Greek Immigrant into a Canadian  
Society, by Alec Economides

19

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Report on

THE GREEK INTERCULTURAL SEMINAR

held at St. Barbabas Anglican Church

March 29, 1974

This seminar was the fourth of a series sponsored by the Citizenship Bureau of the Ministry of Community and Social Services (now Multicultural Development Branch, Ministry of Culture and Recreation). Each has been conducted in a neighbourhood heavily populated by one ethnic group. The aim has been to give an opportunity to teachers, health workers, social workers, government officials and others working in the neighbourhood an opportunity to become acquainted with the culture of the ethnic group. The program, in each case, has been presented by members of the ethnic group. This report is a brief condensation of the proceedings.

Program

Two addresses were presented in the morning and two in the afternoon. A panel of knowledgeable people was available at both times to support the speakers in answering questions from the floor. In the morning, participants divided into eleven small groups for further discussion. At noon, all enjoyed a Greek lunch and Greek dances performed by a group of young Greeks.

Topics of the talks were:

An Overview of the Greek Community  
Greek Family Life  
Health and Adjustment Problems  
Education

### Content

The material under each heading consists of a condensation of an address, with the addition of comments from the discussions.

### An Overview of the Greek Community

The first talk concentrated mainly on differences in tradition and differences in the use of time between Greeks and Canadians.

Canada is an industrial society. Greece's rural population is about three million, approximately thirty-five per cent of the total population. Rural people in Greece comprise over thirty-five per cent of the labour force, while in Canada the proportion is six and one-half per cent.

Western-type development needs a cheap labour force and obtains it through immigration. Between 1961 and 1970, one-tenth of the Greek population emigrated. A large proportion of this emigration was in the 15 to 40 age group, the most productive labour force. A great many of these immigrants came from rural areas. They were forced to emigrate for a better living. This predisposes them against the country to which they emigrate, where they have to compete with people who have longer experience in an industrial society.

Mechanization has taken command in Canada, which is now a consumer oriented society, oriented toward such matters as cars and houses. In Greece the people had time for the joys and sorrows of their fellow workers, time for a two-day wedding celebration and time for festivals, such as the picking of the crops. They live each day fully without waiting for the week-end to arrive.



Folk music is highly developed. Every man knows how to protect his family and his reputation, how to dance or play an instrument, how to express himself well. Here there is a change of spirit and a feeling of nostalgia for the islands and the blue sky of Greece. They are isolated and exploited. Canada has been built by immigrants neither better nor worse than the society in which they live.

### Greek Family Life

The Greek child is born into the family group and remains part of that group, through no effort of his own. The Greek family is not child centred, it is family oriented. The child is accorded a place within the family structure and must learn to subordinate his individuality to that of the family. His contacts with the outside world are made through the family and its extensions. The wishes of the older member come before those of the child.

Family members spend much time together. The word "privacy" has no Greek counterpart. The individual never ceases to have a claim on his family. The family may impoverish itself for the education or dowering of one of the children but the successful life of these children brings honour and satisfaction to the whole family.

Family loyalties transcend all others. Business enterprises are always staffed with near and distant relatives of the owner or manager. People from one's own geographic region are given preference over people from other geographic regions. A man arriving in Canada will seek out people from his own geographic region who will help him with job finding and making use of community resources.

The father is an authority and must be obeyed by all. Traditionally, women wait on men. Discipline of small children is largely the mother's responsibility, but when outsiders are involved, the father is the one who represents the family in the community. Physical punishment is freely used and children are disciplined also through scoldings, ridicule and appeals to parental sacrifices or family honour. A good child is rewarded by praise, candy or toys if the family can afford them. Fathers do not fraternize with sons although they may play with them as babies. The father's authority over the child is unquestioned. It is difficult for him to accept the fact that the state's authority transcends his, as it does in Children's Aid protection cases. Education is highly prized, and parents are anxious that their children do well in school.

Children may be spoonfed up to three and four years of age and forced to eat heartily. Skinny children are ridiculed and seen as a reflection of their parents' inability to provide for them. After childbirth, the mother is expected to visit the church before she returns to her regular duties. The time for weaning and toilet training is more extended than in Canada.

Older daughters are expected to look after children when mothers go to work. The position of a girl in a working class family is often uncomfortable and difficult. In very traditional homes, all her activities outside the home are monitored by parents, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts and cousins. The male members of the family are the custodians of her honour. Her honour is grievously jeopardized if she is seen flirting with boys or meeting them in trysts, and this will affect her opportunities for marriage. Often older brothers will postpone their own marriages until their sisters are married.

A considerable number of marriages are still arranged. Even when they are not, the consent of their respective families is necessary. Dowries are still expected and given. Marriages by proxy or mail are still occurring, but, too frequently, with unhappy results.

The marriage relationship is segregated. Husbands and wives have a clear differentiation of tasks and separate leisure time activities. Greek husbands may spend long hours at the coffeehouse playing cards or discussing politics. Wives are limited to contacts with relatives, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. These are often limited in Canada and women become depressed with disastrous results on marital relationships and the mental health of children.

Greek families are inclined to distrust and suspect the Canadian community and its institutions which they fear undermine parental authority, reduce their status and alienate them from their familiar life style and value system.

The concept of "philotimo", which, loosely translated, means self-esteem, forms the core of the Greek personality. One's philotimo can be easily bruised through an act or unkind word. The inner core of the Greek must never be exposed. As a result, a Greek person does not talk readily of his family and needs considerable emotional support to be able to talk about his family to social workers and health workers.



Greeks are "person-oriented" but need the group for emotional support in order to become individuals. They are not object-oriented people who will join a group in order to achieve a common purpose. When they must act together, they become selfish, concerned about what common actions will do to them as individuals. For this reason, it is difficult to involve Greek people in groups to achieve a specific goal.

### Health and Adjustment Services

The address on this topic, presented by a psychiatrist, was related mainly to the problems of people from small villages, not to the more sophisticated immigrants who learn the language and adapt readily.

Through World War II and the civil war which followed, there was much suffering in Greece. Many died of malnourishment and starvation. Schools were often closed and those people now in their early or late forties got little education. At the end of World War II there was a forced separation of many children from parents from infancy to the age of sixteen. Some of this occurred when they were taken from parents for indoctrination in the Communist philosophy outside the country. Numbers of these were returned later. Others, for protection, were moved by the government from rural border areas into the cities.

Many of those children were never re-united with their parents. Some parents were no longer living. There was great confusion and displacement of people. The children were placed in camps and eventually were given priority to emigrate in groups to the United States or Canada under sponsorship of humanitarian organizations. Members of this group may, at times, show evidence of severe depression. Many Greeks, indeed, still suffer the effects of fear, privation and separation endured during that period of their history.

Parents who are both working often send children home to grandparents, partly because it frees them both to go to work, but probably also as a substitute for themselves to their parents. When school-aged children return to parents who are strangers to them the effect is devastating. Grandparents are sometimes brought here to care for children. They are isolated and depressed and sometimes cannot cope with disobedient children. They try to discipline them by threats and appeals for sympathy for themselves in their suffering.

Proxy marriages often turn out badly. These involve not only older men and younger women but also older women and younger men. The older woman may have come as a domestic, and after sponsoring various members of her family, may sponsor a prospective husband.

Wives who are isolated in the home with small children miss their former social contacts with relatives and neighbours. They become depressed and develop psychosomatic symptoms. They may complain of headaches, faint or have dizzy spells and end up in an emergency room in a nearby hospital. When a check reveals no physical illness they are sent home. They tend to deny any psychological problems because there is a stigma attached to mental illness. They are not referred to a psychiatrist and go from doctor to doctor looking for help. Most discussion groups dealt with the problems of the Greek women - loneliness, lack of social outlets, their helplessness when circumscribed by tradition.

There is medical insurance in Greece, mainly for the working class, but people who benefit from it are a bit skeptical of the efficiency of the service.

Greeks who deal with immigrants should make the Greek community aware of the poison control centre and the suicide prevention bureau. Although immigrants have difficulty utilizing these services because of the language barrier, they should be aware of them. They should become familiar with the visiting nurse and should be encouraged to overcome their feelings of guilt about placing their aged parents in nursing homes. The extended family is fast disappearing.

Many Greeks still believe in the evil eye and there is a religious service to dispel its effects. Among unsophisticated people there is a belief in magic. A girl with a broken romance and suffering humiliation or jealousy may go for help to an old lady who practises magic. There are home remedies which may be misunderstood. Razor scratches are sometimes made on the back to let out a fever. Medical personnel may not be familiar with this practice and may regard it as physical abuse by the parent.

Interpreters are badly needed, but immigrants' dependence on them should be temporary. At first the support of the ethnic group may avert breakdown but it is undesirable that this continue too long. When immigrants do not learn the language and understand Canadian society, they do not understand their rights and are exploited. There should be bilingual professionals in all hospitals and key agencies. Non-Greek professionals should use the services of Greek professionals more readily.



A course for medical and legal interpreters is in progress at George Brown College, with one of the organizers being seconded from the Citizenship Bureau. Around thirty people from four language groups will be available by the end of July, 1974. They are trained to assist doctors, nurses and paramedical staff in hospitals, as well as to assist in courts and other legal settings.

### Education

Education is seen as the main advantage of living in Canada, since broad educational opportunities are open to only a small percentage of children in Greece.

The Greek educational system is subject oriented, not child oriented. There is a lack of faith in the Canadian system because subjects are not taught separately. Grammar and spelling are strongly emphasized. Grammar is a logical structure and needed as a basis for the study of other languages.

The system is authoritarian. The classroom teacher is the sole authority in the elementary school. Greeks do not understand the role of the principal here. In Greece, he is a teacher and does not have authority over other teachers. In high school, the language teacher is the most influential because the curriculum is humanity oriented.

There is a strong stress on discipline. The school is a character-moulding institution and parents expect the school to teach manners. Homework is very important. In the evening the student memorizes what he has learned during the day and is examined on it the next day. Greek parents think children here have little to do and that, therefore, the system is inferior. Religious instruction is considered very important and is a compulsory subject. This is possible because there is practically only one religious denomination.

Parents from rural areas have little education and cannot help their children with their homework. Many times children are made to feel that speaking a second language at home is detrimental to them, and this makes them ashamed of their language and their culture. Teachers should understand how easy it is for a child to learn two languages and should tell children that additional languages are an advantage, because they give them access to the great cultures of their ancestors. There should be provision in teacher training colleges for special courses to help teachers in their work with immigrant children.

Parents do not understand the educational system, especially the streams into which their children are directed. They expect their children to excel in school and if a child demonstrates poor ability or attitude it is seen as a tragedy. They may blame the school system for not forcing children to learn and they may even return to Greece rather than submit to what they consider demeaning treatment of their child.

The I.Q. tests here are a deciding factor in the student's progress. Greeks consider this grossly unfair because success in the tests depends on a knowledge of the English language and to a large extent is also culturally biased against non-anglo-saxon children. Often they are not aware of the importance of the I.Q. tests and blindly sign papers they do not understand. When they discover their children are in courses leading to technical occupations, they may accuse the school of tricking them. It is necessary to have the matter explained to them in their own language by a school staff employee and have them sign a certificate giving their consent.

Parents find themselves in a subordinate role to their children who act as interpreters. Children may deceive their parents by interpreting to their own advantage.

In the old country, teachers are reserved and are held in high respect by parents and children. Here, immigrant parents are shocked when told by a child, "My teacher smokes and wears a mini-skirt."

Communication with schools has improved greatly in recent years. One school has a volunteer parent program, which welcomes parents, whether English-speaking or not, to come and help in the classroom with any kind of activity.

One Canadian participant in the seminar noted that the educational system is an expression of Canadian society. The school is child oriented because society is child oriented and discipline is lax in school because it is lax at home. The school does not set the culture. Society does. The immigrants are really fighting society and this is a rear guard action. As society changes there is always a conflict between the old and the new. It is necessary to interpret the old and the new to each other in order to help both.



## Other Comments

Overseas recruitment officers should be better prepared with a knowledge of the language and the people in the country where they are working. Some participants said that the media, as well as letters from relatives in Canada, present too rosy a picture of life in Canada and more realistic information should be provided. Others thought people would believe what they wanted to believe and would come anyway.

Most Greeks do not come with the expectation of becoming Canadian. They do not feel they will ever become part of Canadian society and make little effort to adapt. Many are ignorant of what is involved in citizenship. If a Greek becomes a Canadian citizen this may create problems for him if he returns to Greece. If he participates in political activities here, this may be noted in his files in Greece.

Canadians cannot appreciate the struggle of newcomers in adapting to a new society. Even becoming proficient in the language doesn't guarantee breaking down the social and cultural barriers of communication.

It is a disadvantage in Canada to be an immigrant and have an accent. This makes young people ashamed of their parents but government is now encouraging people to maintain pride in their backgrounds.

The media present a stereotype of the ethnic group. Canadians get their impression of Greek people from Zorba the Greek. More could be done by educational institutions to reduce stereotyping.

## Attendance

Total attendance at the seminar was 177. Organizations represented are listed below.

Department of Manpower and Immigration	2
Department of the Secretary of State	2
Ontario Advisory Council on Multiculturalism	3
Ministry of Community and Social Services	
Citizenship Bureau - permanent staff	26
Regional Office	2
Vocational Rehabilitation	1

Ministry of Correctional Services	
Probation	1
Ministry of Health	
Mental Retardation Centre	6
Ontario Human Rights Commission	2
Ontario Housing Corporation	2
Ontario Workmens' Compensation Board	3
Toronto Board of Education	
Student Services	7
Principals and Vice-Principals	9
Teachers	8
Teachers of English as a Second Language	4
Toronto Department of Public Health	7
East York Public Health Unit	2
Metro Toronto Police	1
Public Libraries	3
Greek Schools	3
University of Toronto	
Faculty of Education	1
Faculty of Social Work	1
Canada Studies Foundation	2
Atkinson College	
Social Services Department	1
George Brown College	
Students from Interpreter Course	5
Hospitals	6
Queen Street Mental Health Centre	4
Addiction Research Foundation	1
Victorian Order of Nurses	4
Family Service Association	5
Catholic Family Services	2
Children's Aid Society of Metro Toronto	5
Community Information Centre of Metro Toronto	2
Neighbourhood Information Centre	4
Eastminster Community Services	1
Y. M. C. A.	2
Y. W. C. A.	2
International Institute of Metro Toronto	2
Interfaith Immigration Committee of Metro Toronto	2
Canadian National Institute for the Blind	2



Churches	3
C. B. C.	2
National Museum of Man	2
Swallows Day Care Centre	1
Volunteer Information Centre of Metro Toronto	1
Earlscourt Youth Project	1
Greek Information and Social Centre	1
Cross Cultural Communications Centre	1
League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith	1
Students	2
Other Individuals	13

The last category includes a psychiatrist, a psychologist and several interested people, both Greek and native-born.





## GREEK FAMILY LIFE

an address presented by C. Antoniou

at the Greek Intercultural Seminar

St. Barnabas Anglican Church

March 29, 1974

### Greek Family Life

The Greek child is said to be born into a group and remains part of the group through no effort of his own, through no attempt to please. Work and play, eating, conversation, celebration are in terms of the family and are the way through which belongingness is taken on. Contacts with the outside world are made through the family and its extensions. A child's friends are the family friends and their children. He goes visiting and to social gatherings with the family, by day or by night, no matter how late. He goes to church with his parents, to social gatherings or wherever his parents are invited. When parents are entertaining the child is part of the gathering and usually stays up till the guests leave.

The Greek family is not child centered, it is family oriented. The child is not the focus and the family routine is not disrupted or accommodated to the needs of the child. The expectation is that the child will adjust the rhythms and pace of its life to that of the family's. He is accorded a definite place within the structured family and must learn to subordinate his individuality to that of the family. His presence is neither disruptive nor outstanding. Family mealtimes are not changed, other routine activities are not altered to suit the child. Conversation is not trimmed down to meet the child's interests and as a result the child learns to enjoy being with adults and to listen to their conversation. Until recently no effort was made to create a child or teen culture such as exists in North America.

Family members spend much time together. There is no craving for aloneness and the word "privacy" has no Greek counterpart. Self-dependence is prized but the unit of self-dependence is the family not the individual. But the family must be self-dependent in relation to the world except in so far as it has a claim on government aid or assistance. The individual never ceases to have a claim on his family. A married son asks his father for help in business without feeling that he is becoming dependent in character. A daughter asks for things she cannot afford to buy. This is not viewed as dependence but as one's rightful claim on the family. The family may impoverish itself for the education or dowering of one of the children, but the successful life of these children brings honour and satisfaction to the whole family. An uneducated older brother is proud without bitterness of the younger brother whom he helped make a doctor. Many young men emigrate in order to earn a dowry for their sisters or to put younger brothers through university. Conversely a man who has been educated by his brothers and who now holds a high professional position owes it to his family and to his role within it to find positions for his nephews. If he emigrates he will see to it that other members of the family are sponsored and set up in the new country.

Family loyalties transcend all others. Business enterprises are always staffed with near and distant relatives of the owner or manager. People from one's own geographic region are given preference over people from other geographic regions. There are over one hundred Greek organizations in Toronto, ninety-five per cent of which are fraternal associations of people from a specific geographical region such as Laconia, Corinthia, Macedonia, etc. A man arriving in Canada without a sponsor will seek out people from his own geographic region who will undertake to steer him to the appropriate community resources or individuals who will provide him with a job. Perhaps this pattern is waning as a result of more effective government services such as the provision of interpreters at reception and the processing centres.

The father is an authority and must be obeyed by all. Traditionally women wait on men. A Greek villager may ride while his wife follows on foot. Discipline, when the children are very young is largely the mother's responsibility. When major offences are committed or outsiders such as school authorities, the police or neighbours are involved, then the father may become involved. Physical punishment is freely used, particularly a slap on the face or the rear accompanied by much shouting and invective. Children are also disciplined through scoldings, ridicule and appeals to parental sacrifices or family honour. The child is given freedom in his behaviour with the limits supplied by personal relationships. It is not wrong to be boisterous and noisy but it is wrong to be so when



father does not like it, or during a visit or when it interrupts mother's work. The child is always on the periphery, never in the centre; the wishes of the older members come first.

A good child listens to his parents, runs errands and brings home praise from teachers. He is rewarded by praise, candy or toys if the family can afford them. A poor school record on the other hand brings on parental displeasure, shame on the whole family and ridicule on the child. Since education is highly prized and is seen as a means of social mobility and as a vehicle for advancement in life, parents are eager to please the school authorities and enjoin the child to work and excel in his studies. On the other hand parental feelings can be easily bruised when parents feel that their child is not being properly taught, is given no homework or demonstrates attitudes to school and learning which are inconsistent with the parents' concepts and image of the school.

It is indeed a calamity for a Greek parent to be told that his child does not have the ability to proceed to a four or five year secondary program. Parents plan ahead for the child's future irrespective of scholastic performance or potential so that when the child demonstrates poor ability or attitude it is seen as a tragedy. Some parents, feeling perhaps that the school system is to blame, prefer to return to Greece rather than submit to what they consider demeaning treatment of their child by the Canadian school system. The stock statement that parents often make with respect to their children is "we came here for the sake of the children."

Authority lines within the family remain fairly entrenched. Fathers do not fraternize with sons although they may play with them when they are babies. Following the sixth or seventh year the child is expected to begin showing respect, and accord the father the privileges of his position. The father's authority over the child is unquestioned. It is difficult for him to accept the fact that the state's authority transcends his in countries such as Canada (protection cases, etc.).

The child, although not the focus of the family, is a valued member and is viewed with tremendous pride, particularly if he is accomplished. When very young he is exhibited to relatives and visitors and may be asked to stand on a chair and recite a poem or sing a song. Praise or criticism are freely verbalized in his presence. He may be spoon fed by the mother up to three and four years of age and food is forced on him in scenes that are emotionally charged with the mother protesting that the child doesn't love her if he won't eat his food. A well-fed baby is a

sign of health and well-being. Skinny or scrawny children are ridiculed and may be seen as a reflection on their parents' ability to provide for them. In traditional rural homes the baby is still swaddled. Swaddling enables the child to grow erect and firm like a cypress tree. This practice is being gradually abandoned. The child is normally breastfed and is not weaned until eighteen to twenty-four months. After childbirth the mother is expected to stay in bed for at least eight days and cannot leave the house for forty. She is expected to visit the church before she returns to her regular duties. Toilet training starts at eight months for urination and eighteen to twenty-four months for bowel movements. Training is not rigid and the child is allowed to develop at his own pace.

If there are older siblings, particularly girls, the baby is left in their care while the mother works. This task also often falls on the grandmother who may be living in the house or sometimes she may even be sponsored to immigrate in order to care for her daughter's or son's babies. Often the reverse occurs. A baby is sent to the grandmother in Greece so that both parents can work. The child is returned to his parents at the age of eight or nine with the result that he doesn't know who his parents are. These children are often confused, disoriented and find it difficult to conceptualize and form relationships.

Boys as a rule are not given responsibilities such as making their beds or tidying up their rooms. Girls assume such responsibilities as a matter of course and often they are expected to look after younger siblings until parents get home from work. Role differentiation between boys and girls begins early and by adolescence it is clearly defined. Adolescent boys often expect their sisters to wait on them, serve their meals, wash and iron their clothes. Boys may engage in heterosexual relationships openly or surreptitiously but this privilege is not accorded to girls.

The position of an adolescent girl in a working class family is often an uncomfortable difficult one. In very traditional homes all her activities outside the home are monitored not only by her parents but also by siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins. The male members of the family are the custodians of her honour. Her honour is grievously jeopardized if she is seen flirting with boys or meeting them in trysts. In villages for a girl to acquire a bad name is tantamount to remaining single unless she commands a large dowry or she succeeds in having a young man fall in love with her. Shotgun weddings are not unusual. There is a folk saying to the effect that it is better to lose an eye than acquire a bad reputation. As a rule older brothers will postpone their own marriages until their sisters are married. Since the 1950's however, large numbers of young girls were given the opportunity to emigrate to overseas countries alone under the auspices of international agencies. Many have come to Canada as domestics during the decade of 1950-60.



A considerable number of marriages are still arranged. Even if the two young people like one another the consent of their respective families is still necessary. Dowries in rural Greece and in cities are still expected and given. In fact up to recently Greek Army officers were forbidden to marry girls who had no dowries. The custom is not observed to the same extent by Greeks who live overseas. Marriages by proxy or mail are still occurring, usually when an older man who has spent his youth building up a business sends home for a bride often twenty years younger. Such marriages obviously pose serious problems for the girl, and often end in separation or a tolerated emotional divorce.

Greek marriages are becoming increasingly companionate. Romantic love is as rampant as anywhere else but it is considered to be a poor basis for marriage unless of course the couple is matched economically and socially.

The marital relationship can be best described as segregated, as distinguished from the joint relationship that characterizes the middle class North American family. Elizabeth Bott, who observed this phenomenon among working class families in England, describes it as follows: "Husband and wife have a clear differentiation of task and a considerable number of separate interests and activities. They have a clearly defined division of labour into male tasks and female tasks. They expect to have different leisure pursuits and the husband has his friends."

A favourite pursuit of Greek husbands is spending long hours at the coffeehouse playing cards or discussing politics. This practice continues even when they emigrate. Wives on the other hand limit their contacts only to relatives, family friends, neighbors or work colleagues. If these are lacking, as they often are in Canada, they become depressed, develop psychosomatic or somatic complaints, fears, obsessions, or hysteric reactions, with disastrous results on the mental health of the children and the marital relationship. Some dominant reactions of Greek families in respect to children and the social environment are attitudes of distrust and suspicion of the generalized community including educational institutions which they feel undermine parental authority, fear of loss of control over the children, status reduction, a lost sense of belongingness and alienation from a life-style that does not support the definitions of good and bad which form the core of the Greek value system.

Perhaps Greek people can be best described as person-oriented individualists. The concept of philotimo which loosely translated means self-esteem forms the core of the Greek personality. The essence of philotimo is inviolability and freedom. It means that people are touchy since one's philotimo can be easily bruised through an act or unkind word. To protect the integrity of philotimo the covering of naked fact is essential. The inner core of the Greek must never be exposed and entropé, the Greek word for shame, modesty, decency, propriety, self-consciousness and embarrassment, means turning inward. A Greek person as a result does not talk readily of his family and he certainly needs considerable emotional support to be able to verbalize feelings about himself or his family in treatment and case-work situations.

To person-oriented as opposed to object-oriented individuals, or - to use Robert K. Merton's dichotomy between "locals" and "cosmopolitan" - existence apart from the group, especially the primary group, offers no psychological supports and is undesirable. A person-oriented individual develops his aspirations within his group, and he needs the group in order to become an individual. Consequently when person-oriented individuals must act together, they lose interest and become "selfish", that is, concerned about what common action will do to them as individuals. Object-oriented people on the other hand will join a group in order to achieve a common purpose. This may explain the difficulty of involving Greek people in groups to achieve a specific goal. One concludes that culture is a powerful determinant of behaviour. It dictates how developmental tasks in the life of the individual are to be solved and therefore it imparts a cultural underlay to character formation. On the other hand, one must never lose sight of the fact that culture never succeeds in submerging totally the individuality of its members. One is first and foremost an individual and then a cultural being.



CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT  
OF THE GREEK IMMIGRANT INTO CANADIAN SOCIETY

by Alec Economides

It has been widely accepted that socialization plays a major role in shaping a person's attitudes. Instances may arise in one's life where he may be resocialized. This change may be temporary as in the case of the army, or it may be of a more permanent nature as is the case of a reform institution. Even though everyone is continuously being socialized, there is a fair amount of cohesion between his past and present socialization process. When one is placed in a situation where there is a marked break between his previously acquired culture and the one he is faced with (as is the case of a soldier, delinquent, or immigrant), it becomes more difficult to continue the socialization process--since in such cases it is a matter of re-socializing rather than continuing socialization. Many factors influence the extent to which one adapts to a new culture. For some it is a matter of resistance to change per se; the vast majority however, find it difficult to acquire new norms that may be contradictory to ones they have already internalized. Some of the factors that may influence the acquisition of a new culture by immigrants--and specifically Greek immigrants--will be examined in this paper.

Over 90% of the Greek immigrants come from the working class with a rural background. In many such areas education is limited to no more than grade six. Even in large cities such as Athens opportunities for higher education are restricted to the children of the upper class. This stronghold on education is one of the obvious means by which the upper class can block upward mobility of the lower classes thus maintaining their privileged positions in a relatively immobile society. Inadequate

education and limited contact with the world beyond the boundaries of their localities may be one of the reasons that a type of *Gemeinschaft* society can still be found in some rural areas in Greece. This communal society, wherever it exists, has been greatly weakened by the everyday expanding technology of communications and the reduction of cultural barriers. However, immigrants with this kind of folk cultural background tend to be somewhat insecure and less flexible, and thus more inhibited in adapting to the Canadian culture. The lack of education of the above-mentioned immigrants is partly responsible for the great difficulty they encounter in learning the English language. Deficiency in the English language not only isolates them from the effect that the mass media has in transmitting culture in our society, but it results in low-paying jobs, low status, and, since most information, if not all, is published in English, this very large segment of Greek immigrants is unaware of what government services are available to them.

One must note, however, that insufficient education is not the only factor which presents difficulty in learning English. Many newcomers find employment in places where English is not spoken or, if it is, is very limited and at times incorrect. Although many of them are eager to learn the new language and enroll in great numbers in English language classes, their attendance is in most cases sporadic due to irregular working conditions and hours. Quite frequently getting a job--any job--is considered more important than learning the language because of lack of other means of financial support. Thus, many manage to find a job either in a Greek-speaking environment or somewhere else where understanding English is not a prerequisite. Their problems, however, are not over, as the continuous deficiency in the language has its economic, psychological and sociological repercussions. In many cases, it prevents them from establishing any kind of social identity for themselves and puts upward mobility beyond their reach. Although it may be pointed out that there are enough opportunities in the form of association dances, coffee houses, stores, etc., within the Greek community enabling non-English speaking immigrants to lead a fairly full life, there have been reports of them being exploited by more successful compatriots in the community to whom they turn because of lack of language facility. For example, electricians who must pass a government examination for a certificate which will enable them to practice are being charged up to three hundred dollars for having the two-hour duration test translated to them.

In Greece, women find companionship with neighbours and relatives, but here most of them cannot communicate with neighbours, and although they talk with their relatives over the phone, conditions prevent them from

coming in contact with them as often as they would like. It can be said that at the beginning, Greek immigrants of this type are socially isolated and their contacts with the larger Canadian society as well as with the Greek community are limited. The social heritage which they have brought with them is still very strong and the rate of their acculturation is very slow. However, this changes somewhat in the public domain as they try to establish themselves in occupations where they find their first friends and are exposed to the cultural traits of their new land.

Often, in this case, cultural conservatism which prevails at home begins to accommodate demands made by the public sector to the extent that at times the immigrant's public behaviour differs from that of his private life. This is partly the reason why those in the labour force are more apt to adapt to the new culture than those who stay home (for example, aged relatives who rarely go out alone and thus do not have to learn the English language). The fact remains, however, that for the uneducated majority of the immigrants, cultural integration is a very slow and gradual process.

In the areas from which most of the immigrants come the family is patriarchal, close-knit, and male dominated. Quite often the father exercises control over his children's occupation and selection of their marital partners. Children are expected to obey and respect their parents and generally all the elders of their town. The family is the nucleus of social activity in Greece and when they are here it (family) becomes the area where a high degree of cultural conservatism is consistently practised. The family becomes the stronghold of Greek non-material as well as material culture in the new land. (It is this primary group that during the early stages gives the immigrant the most support.) A basic factor, however, which tends to modify Greek family patterns is the fact that a great number --found to be 86% by Dr. Nagata\*--of Greek women enter the Canadian labour force. It has stated above that the majority of Greek immigrants come from a culture where the family is male-dominated, the father providing for the family and making all the rules and decisions. But once they are in Canada, in their quest to make and save money, many women take up employment and thus become financially co-supporters of the family, as they contribute to the common fund. This alone provides them with more independence and prestige. It alters their traditional roles and status in the family to the extent that I suspect some role strain in the family is widely experienced. But although there is a great amount of emotion invested in the traditional roles, to the immigrant work is so important that some Greek values have to be overlooked. A situation may

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\* Mentioned in her presentation at the conference on "New Canadians - their Expectations and Reality" on Feb. 13, 14, 1970 at the New St. Lawrence Centre.



also exist when the man has been in Canada for sometime before bringing over his spouse. Having been somewhat exposed to the Canadian way of thinking, he may feel justified in expecting her to take up employment. The wife on the other hand, having just left a society where the role of the wife and mother is still traditional, may experience mixed emotions and a feeling of degradation known to those few women in Greece who are forced to work. While the wife is at work, the husband has to do the dishes, cook or even babysit, resulting in more equality regarding social and moral liberties for the wife. It is not only in their family however that many of them lose their status but also in the society as a whole. Social stratification depends on the values of a particular system. Therefore in the society (their village) where they came from, they may have been ranked highly depending on the value system of their particular region. However once they are in Ontario that particular value system may not hold any more, resulting in an automatic experience of loss of prestige and power. Many husbands try to justify sending their wives to work with the thought that here they did not receive any dowry from their wives as they would have in Greece where the tradition still prevails--much to the desperation of many fathers of young ladies! Rationalizing in this manner, I suppose, helps swallow a hurt pride and makes the adjustment to the situation less painful.

I think it is safe to say that, generally, people in Greece are more concerned about the present, leaving the planning and worries of tomorrow for when that comes. If work is available they will work and when the day is over, after making the necessary provisions for themselves or the family, they will spend the rest of their earnings in company with their family or friends in enjoying themselves. I remember finding very strange the fact that people in Canada shop once a week, for back home people do their shopping on a day-to-day basis. Now looking back, I remember also how highly unusual it is for someone to have a bank book even if he makes more than he can actually spend. People just do not seem to make plans for the future. But for most Greeks in Canada we witness a departure from this customary Greek way of living. When they leave Greece most of them do so with the belief that this transplantation is temporary and that they will be returning as soon as they have accumulated enough fortune. As a result, when here they become frugal, in some cases taking any job that is available or working excessively hard and for long hours. Thus, by restricting their movement from home to work and back, their exposure to culture contact is minimized. This at the early stages tends to retard the process of their integration, especially when the job does not provide any cultural stimulation. Of course soon enough (and this is not to say that all immigrants never go back) they realize that making a fortune is not something very easy.

Their children are getting their education here, many immigrants buy houses, and sooner or later they realize that to leave Canada and go back to Greece will be almost as difficult as it was when they left Greece for Canada. So most of those who stay, once they feel secure, after being here for sometime, begin to explore their environment and gradually to establish themselves socially, as by now they have the time and ambition to become involved with their neighbours, make friends, join different organizations and associations or other types of cultural groups.

Traditional difficulties which have always existed between the majority of parents and children of practically all cultures are intensified in Greek immigrant families. A child's opportunity in school is greatly influenced by the social level of his family. The immigrant children find themselves somewhat handicapped in school where verbal and cultural abilities play an important role. All adolescents go through a period of transition during which the need to sustain a self identity is paramount. To this effect they are assisted by the peer group--one of the most important socializing agents. The immigrant child quite often finds himself excluded and rejected from the peer group and therefore deprived from the benefits it provides in introducing the child to the social values and status. In most cases they are rejected not because they fail to conform but because of their ethnic or social background. Many of the immigrant children, when in school, overcome status which rests on family background by exhibiting special facility in an area highly valued by the peer group (for example, excelling academically or athletically). The attitude of the teacher toward the immigrant child is also an important factor and should not be overlooked.

However as the children are striving to break down the cultural isolation, establish themselves, and gain recognition among their peers they are continuously confronted with the cultural conservatism of their parents or aged relatives. Caught between two different cultures the children are faced with the task of integrating both cultures. They find themselves in the middle of a contest of influence between parents and peers. The immigrant parent expects his child to subscribe to the traditional Greek way, while the peer group demands conformity to its own values which are focussed on sociability. The parents can be the most influential due to the early access to the child. An example of this disparity of expectations is the controversial problem of dating. While in Canada the only way for a girl to go to a party is to be escorted by a date, in Greece to be escorted by someone other than a relative is thought of in most cases as immoral. A young Greek girl wanting to go on a date



would be faced with emphatic disapproval and firm objections of her parents on one hand, or with the smirking faces and rejection of her peers if she went with a relative on the other. She is confronted with the problem of appeasing her parents while not becoming the laughing stock of her peers. Parents eventually have to be resocialized and made to accept the idea that dating is not immoral. Another situation many immigrant parents have to adapt to emerges from the fact that, as their children develop their skills in the English language, they become very useful in translating documents, in explaining news or acting as interpreters for their parents. This gives them a kind of status in the family. They sense their parents' dependency and tend not to accept orders from them as readily as they would under the traditions and the situations prevailing in Greece. Their parents' inadequacies and social isolation causes many immigrant children to feel embarrassed, if not ashamed, of them and I have heard of instances in which children have scoffed at their parents' knowledge of English. One may say, however, that the parent-child interaction is a continuous give and take process which under normal circumstances can be very constructive for both parties. When a kind of participatory socialization and much verbal communication is practised, it enables the parent, through his child, to come in contact with the Canadian culture and thus be helped to understand the Canadian customs and way of thinking. On the other hand the child can benefit too because he can be helped to understand his own background as well as his parents attitudes and feelings, retain their language and find support and satisfaction within the family.

In metropolitan centres like Toronto, where many Greek immigrants are situated, numerous associations run mostly by well-established compatriots are formed. Social activities of these associations are, to a great extent, "Canadianized". This could provide the newly arrived immigrant with an opportunity to be exposed to Canadian culture by coming in contact with other Greeks who have already been somewhat resocialized. Unfortunately it seems that at the beginning when the immigrant arrives here he finds himself too preoccupied with the problem of employment, shelter, food, etc., to pay any attention or get involved. Social and financial barriers such as high membership fees or status requirements which the new immigrant cannot meet may also keep him out of these organizations. Of course, many of them take part and enjoy Greek-style affairs such as picnics, dances, etc., which serve to familiarize them with the associations which, as we have said earlier, they join in later years. In my opinion, however, the fact remains that in the process of acculturation of the Greek immigrant, the existing institutional structure of the Greek community has little to offer.



The problems an immigrant faces during his period of adjustment are immense. The norms and values he must acquire are not only new but quite often incompatible with the ones he has already internalized, and departure from them does not come about without sacrifices. The extent to which the immigrant will integrate into Canadian society depends on numerous factors and I have by no means covered all areas of social adjustment that the Greek immigrant is faced with.

My study obviously cannot apply to every individual and I have only generalized on those immigrants from rural background (excluding the minority of professionals and those from urban areas).

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